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Implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits

Modalities of the inter-agency coordination of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society, including recommendations on the follow-up process

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to a request contained in paragraph 15 of General Assembly resolution 60/252. In that resolution, the Assembly endorsed the outcomes of the Tunis phase of the World Summit on the Information Society and stipulated that the report should be submitted to the Economic and Social Council for consideration at its substantive session. In the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, the Summit requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Assembly, through the Council by June 2006, a report on the modalities of the inter-agency coordination of the implementation of the outcomes of the Summit, including recommendations on the follow-up process.

* E/2006/100.

** The present report was submitted late owing to the need to reflect the outcomes of consultations on the role of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development and the meeting of the multi-stakeholder advisory group of the Internet Governance Forum held on 16 May and 22-23 May 2006 respectively in Geneva.

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I. Introduction

1. The outcomes of the Geneva and Tunis phases of the World Summit on the Information Society outline a comprehensive vision for a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society, in which information and communication technologies would be harnessed to empower individuals, communities and nations to achieve their full potential. Their main thrust is harnessing the potential of information and communication technologies as tools for achieving the internationally agreed development goals. Such technologies can be a powerful instrument for reducing poverty by empowering the poor and the marginalized, increasing access to health and education, enhancing productivity, generating economic growth, fostering job creation and employability, advancing environmental sustainability and improving quality of life for all. They can also promote dialogue among people, nations and civilizations. At the same time, the Summit addressed many critical issues concerning the creation of an enabling environment for the age of Internet and the information society and put into place a process to address those issues.

2. At present, the benefits of the information and communication technology revolution are unevenly distributed between countries and within societies. Participants in the Summit therefore stated their firm commitment to turn the digital divide into a digital opportunity for all, particularly those who risk being left behind and being further marginalized.

3. In order to forge a coherent, effective and sustainable global effort to meet the challenges of building a truly global information society, the Plan of Action, adopted in Geneva in 2003 (A/C.2/59/3, annex, chap. I, sect. B) set out 11 agreed action lines and established a set of connectivity targets to be reached by 2015, inspired by the Millennium Development Goals. In the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, adopted in November 2005 (A/60/687, chap. I, sect. B), world leaders agreed to a concrete blueprint and mechanism to achieve those objectives, involving all stakeholders and with particular reliance on different institutions and bodies within the United Nations system. The Summit recognized as well that implementation of and follow-up to its outcomes was a significant part of the integrated and coordinated follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits and would further the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

4. A major feature of the process was the unprecedented engagement of the private sector, civil society and technical communities in the preparation of the two phases of the Summit and in the Summit meetings themselves. As a result, the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society explicitly highlight the need to take the multi-stakeholder approach into account in all implementation and follow-up activities.

5. As noted above, the first phase of the Summit formulated a Plan of Action containing a number of indicative targets, to be achieved by 2015, that are to serve as global references for improving connectivity and access in the use of information and communication technologies. The Plan identifies 11 action lines corresponding to the key principles of an "information society for all", as formulated in the Declaration of Principles (A/C.2/59/3, annex, chap. I, sect. A). The second phase of the Summit focused on three major issues: financial mechanisms for meeting the

challenges of information and communication technologies for development, Internet governance and implementation and follow-up.

6. While providing an overview of developments since the Tunis phase, the present report, in accordance with the mandate in General Assembly resolution 60/252, focuses on processes for inter-agency coordination of the implementation of the outcomes of both phases of the Summit and on making some recommendations on the follow-up process.

II. Implementation and follow-up

7. The Tunis Agenda for the Information Society (see A/60/687, chap. I, sect. B) adopted at the second phase of the Summit sets out mechanisms for implementation and follow-up at the national, regional and international levels. The outcomes of the Summit make a distinction between implementation, for which primary responsibility rests on all stakeholders, and follow-up, which entails review of progress on Summit issues and policy debate at the intergovernmental level. The outcomes also link the follow-up to guidance provided in General Assembly resolution 57/270 B.

8. At the international level, the Tunis Agenda provides a detailed blueprint for implementation and follow-up actions involving all stakeholders. Specific requests are addressed to the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Secretary-General, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), United Nations agencies such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as well as the regional commissions.

A. Coordination of inter-agency implementation

9. The implementation of the Summit outcomes is particularly challenging for many reasons. These include the complex and interconnected nature of the issues involved, the rapidity of change in the field of information and communication technology and the cross-cutting nature of the issue, which touches on the mandates of most United Nations entities.

10. The Tunis Agenda provides guidance on inter-agency coordination of implementation of Summit outcomes. It stresses the importance of multi-stakeholder implementation at the international level and states that such implementation should be organized taking into account the themes and action lines in the Plan of Action and be moderated or facilitated by United Nations agencies where appropriate. In implementation of the Tunis Agenda, a meeting of stakeholders was convened by ITU, UNESCO and UNDP in February 2006 in Geneva at which provisional focal points were identified for each of the 11 action lines. In May 2006, in conjunction with the celebration of World Information Society Day, action line meetings were held to develop appropriate work programmes and methods.

11. The Tunis Agenda requests the Secretary-General, in consultation with members of CEB, to establish within the Board a United Nations group on the information society, consisting of the relevant United Nations bodies and

organizations with the mandate to facilitate the implementation of the outcomes of the Summit. In considering lead agencies for this work, the text stipulates that CEB should take into consideration the experience and activities of ITU, UNESCO and UNDP.

12. In April 2006 CEB approved the establishment of such a group. According to its terms of reference, as elaborated by the CEB High Level Committee on Programmes and endorsed by CEB, the overall purpose of the Group will be to act as an information and coordination nexus between multiple stakeholders for the inter-agency activities associated with the implementation of the Summit outcomes.

13. The main objective of the Group will be to promote a coordinated approach to the substantive and policy issues facing the United Nations system's implementation of the Plan of Action and the Tunis Agenda, thereby contributing to improving policy coherence in the United Nations system, as requested by the world leaders at the 2005 World Summit.

14. As the focal point for inter-agency coordination with respect to implementation, the United Nations group on the information society will interface with country-level coordination arrangements spearheaded by the resident coordinator system and with the United Nations Development Group. The principal task of the resident coordinator system will be to mainstream the Summit outcomes into the United Nations Development Assistance Framework/common country assessment and poverty reduction strategy papers and to support Governments in incorporating Summit outcomes and information and communication technologies into their national development strategies and e-strategies.

15. In order to achieve its objectives, the group will, inter alia:

(a) Contribute to the implementation of the Plan of Action and the Tunis Agenda, primarily at the international level, by mainstreaming the information society agenda into the activities and programmes of CEB member organizations. In this context, the group would coordinate closely with the mechanisms for national and regional implementation established in paragraphs 100 and 101 of the Tunis Agenda, as well as the multi-stakeholder implementation process set out in paragraphs 108-110;

(b) Facilitate synergies among organizations belonging to the United Nations system to maximize joint efforts, avoid duplication and enhance effectiveness in achieving the Summit outcomes;

(c) Promote public awareness about implementation of the Summit outcomes by the United Nations system.

16. The group will work to accomplish the following tasks:

(a) Monitor progress and key activities relating to the implementation of Summit outcomes, based on input and reports from CEB member organizations;

(b) Work with the United Nations Development Group to ensure that the implementation of the Plan of Action is closely linked to the planning and implementation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework at the country level;

(c) Facilitate inter-agency information exchange and activities, including sharing of experiences and lessons learned, in particular with regard to Summit goals, by ensuring the coherence of the stocktaking exercise;

(d) Work closely with the Partnership on Measuring Information and Communication Technologies for Development in order to streamline the approach of the United Nations system to the development of appropriate indicators and benchmarking;

(e) Promote effective communication and collaboration between the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations outside the system and civil society and private sector partners, including in relation to the work of multi-stakeholder groups or networks;

(f) Establish mechanisms to report regularly to other Summit stakeholders on its activities, in particular on the preparation of any analytical reports on Summit implementation to be delivered to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly;

(g) Disseminate information on the status of implementation within the United Nations system as well as to the general public.

17. The chair of the group will rotate on a yearly basis among ITU, UNESCO and UNDP. The co-chair will be elected from among the other members of the group on a rotational basis. Secretariat and logistical support will be provided by the chairing organizations.

18. The group will establish a workplan that will be updated every two years. It will make maximum use of electronic working methods and will meet not more than once annually. It will cooperate closely, as appropriate, with the regional commissions and the Bretton Woods institutions. The first meeting of the group will be held in July 2006.

Recommendations

19. **The Economic and Social Council may wish to take note of the actions taken by CEB for the establishment of the United Nations group on the information society and request to be kept informed of progress in its work, in the context of reporting by the Secretary-General to the Council on activities in follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society.**

20. **United Nations system entities engaged in the implementation of the Geneva and Tunis outcomes of the Summit are encouraged to support the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Science and Technology for Development in the exercise of their respective functions with regard to system-wide follow-up to the Summit.**

B. Intergovernmental follow-up

21. The Tunis Agenda for the Information Society, as endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 60/252, stipulates that the Assembly will carry out an overall review of the Summit in 2015. The Economic and Social Council has been requested to oversee the system-wide follow-up of the Geneva and Tunis outcomes. The modalities of such oversight are to be decided by the Council. In connection

with this request, the Council has also been requested to review, at its substantive session of 2006, the composition, mandate and agenda of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, including considering strengthening the Commission, taking into account the multi-stakeholder approach.

Recommendations

22. **As the overall review of the Summit coincides with the final year of the Millennium Development Goal process, the Council may wish to propose that the General Assembly use this opportunity to place such a review in the context of the broader review of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.**

23. **The Council may wish to carry out its responsibilities for overseeing the system-wide follow-up to the Summit outcomes in the context of its annual consideration of the integrated and coordinated follow-up to and implementation of major United Nations conferences and summits on the basis of a thematic approach that would link the outcomes of the Summit with internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals. Such a review could be conducted within the coordination segment on the basis of a multi-year programme in accordance with General Assembly resolution 57/270 B, drawing, inter alia, upon the work of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development (see para. 32 below).**

24. In preparation for the review of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development by the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 2006, an initial informal meeting was organized by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on 13 February 2006. In response to a request for open consultations on the subject, an open-ended informal meeting was convened in Geneva on 16 May 2006 by the President of the Council to obtain the views of all stakeholders: Governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector. To facilitate the discussion, UNCTAD, in consultation with the Economic and Social Council secretariat, prepared an informal background note on possible options for consideration by the Council in the reform of the Commission.

25. The informal background note outlined the background and current framework of the Commission, summarized the relevant decisions of the 2005 World Summit and the World Summit on the Information Society and proposed a framework for consideration on strengthening the Commission to deal with follow-up to the Summit. In particular, the note proposed two elements for a new focus of the Commission: contributing to the follow-up by the Economic and Social Council to the 2005 World Summit outcome in the area of science and technology and assisting the Council in the system-wide follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society.

26. On the follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society, the note proposed that the Commission could:

(a) Review progress at the international, regional and national levels in the implementation of action lines, recommendations and commitments contained in the final documents of the Summit;

(b) Make recommendations to the Council on policy guidance and options for future activities to follow up the Plan of Action and the Tunis Agenda;

(c) Promote dialogue and build partnerships for the further development of the information society with the participation of all stakeholders (including Governments, international organizations, the private sector and civil society).

27. To that end, the note contained proposals on, inter alia, increasing the membership of the Commission to 53 members from the current 33; finding appropriate modalities for engaging non-governmental stakeholders; increasing the duration of the annual regular session of the Commission from the current five working days to eight (including two days to accommodate multi-stakeholder contributions); and adopting the format of two-year cycles, with a review session in the first year and a policy session in the second.

28. An informal summary of the discussion in the open-ended informal meeting of 16 May 2006 circulated by the President of the Council indicated that many delegates supported some or all of the proposals in the informal background note on ways of strengthening the Commission, especially with regard to membership, mandate agenda and modalities of work. The need to maintain the original mandate of the Commission in promoting science and technology for development, in addition to follow-up to the Summit, was strongly emphasized.

29. The informal summary noted that all participants had highlighted the need to maintain the development dimension in the follow-up to the Summit, which should constitute an integral part of the integrated follow-up to all major United Nations conferences and summits so as to ensure coherence and coordination. A number of delegates stressed the importance of efficiency in the working methods of the Commission in the follow-up process. In this regard, they proposed the use of electronic media to disseminate information related to the follow-up process.

30. The informal summary further indicated that several speakers had highlighted the importance of maintaining the momentum of multi-stakeholder participation, especially of non-State actors, such as civil society and the private sector, which was unique to the World Summit on the Information Society process and, in this context, noted that the Global Alliance for Information and Communication Technologies and Development launched by the Secretary-General recently would provide a useful multi-stakeholder platform in support of both the Council and the Commission. It was also emphasized that no new bodies should be created in the follow-up process and that resources should be used efficiently and effectively.

31. In his concluding statement, the President of the Council stated that the discussion constituted an important step in the process leading up to the session of the Council in July. He considered it important not to reopen the question of the role of the Council and, accordingly, of the Commission, in the follow-up, as reflected in paragraph 105 of the Tunis Agenda, and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 60/252. He observed that participants had generally expressed support for the ideas contained in the background note, while some had advised caution and stressed the need for efficiency and avoiding duplication. He noted that most speakers had observed that the Commission should not give up its original role and purposes, and that follow-up to the Summit would be an important additional role. The President expected more ideas and proposals to come from Member States. An

informal draft summary of the meeting was circulated in New York and Geneva at the end of May 2006.

32. At the conclusion of its ninth session, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development adopted a resolution recommending that the Council request the Commission, while continuing its existing science and technology for development mandate, to enhance its future work programmes to include follow-up to the outcomes of the 2005 World Summit and the World Summit on the Information Society, in accordance with paragraph 105 of the Tunis Agenda. The Commission also decided that the theme for the 2006-2008 review and policy cycle would be "promoting the building of a people-centred, development-oriented and inclusive information society, with a view to enhancing digital opportunities for all people".

Recommendations

33. **In its review of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development and in formulating new Summit-related functions for the Commission in addition to its traditional mandate, the Economic and Social Council may wish to build on the outcome of the informal meeting held on 16 May 2006. It may also wish to consider a body of practice developed over the years for the other functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council that serve as focal points for the follow-up to major conferences and summits such as the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, South Africa, 2002), the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995) and the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995). In particular, the Council may consider organizing in alternate years review and policy sessions of the Commission, as is now increasingly accepted practice in other functional commissions. Also, there is substantial experience in pursuing a multi-year programme and a thematic approach.**

34. **In order for the Commission on Science and Technology for Development to assist the Council in carrying out its functions, it may undertake a thematic review of follow-up of outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society. To this end, the Council may wish to strengthen the Commission by reviewing its mandate, composition and agenda and the modalities of the Commission's new functions related to such follow-up, as outlined in paragraphs 24-32 above.**

35. **In assisting the Council in the oversight of the system-wide follow-up to the outcomes of the Summit, the Commission could draw upon the work of the United Nations group on the information society (see para. 11 above). Information on country-level activities could be gathered through the United Nations Development Group from the resident coordinator system, as well as through voluntary country case studies and peer reviews.**

C. Other developments relevant to Summit follow-up

Multi-stakeholder engagement

36. Both the Geneva and Tunis outcomes of the Summit stressed the need to mainstream a multi-stakeholder approach into implementation and follow-up

activities at all levels and along all action lines. The 2005 World Summit Outcome stressed that "the Council should serve as a quality platform for high-level engagement among Member States and with the international financial institutions, the private sector and civil society on emerging global trends, policies and action" (General Assembly resolution 60/1, para. 155 (a)).

37. As regards implementation of outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the international level, stakeholders are being encouraged to develop inclusive, bottom-up, multi-stakeholder groups or networks in partnership with United Nations agencies, based on the action lines of the Plan of Action and the relevant substantive elements of the Tunis Agenda, with organizations of the United Nations system acting as facilitators/moderators when appropriate (see Tunis Agenda, para. 108, and para. 11 above). The connection of those networks with the United Nations would be one of the partnerships, with all stakeholders equally empowered to play their full part in promoting implementation. The country-level thematic groups would be an important source and component of such networks. Coordination among these broad-based networks will be ensured by ITU, UNDP and UNESCO, in collaboration with other moderators and facilitators in line with the Tunis Agenda, and by those three agencies working with the United Nations group on the information society. Information on their activities will be provided to the group by the coordinators/facilitating agencies or entities, as applicable.

38. With respect to follow-up activities, broad-based consultations brought out the need for an innovative approach that would ensure appropriate, meaningful and sustained engagement of non-governmental stakeholders with established intergovernmental procedures, in particular in the Council. To that end, in March 2006 the Secretary-General launched a Global Alliance for Information and Communication Technologies and Development — an initiative for promoting multi-stakeholder dialogue and providing an innovative, inclusive and interactive channel for multi-stakeholder input to policy debate to be conducted in the Council and, in the light of the Council's decisions, in the Commission. The inaugural meeting of the Alliance in Kuala Lumpur on 19 and 20 June 2006 attracted extensive participation by Governments, business, media and civil society leaders, academia and the technical community.

39. The Alliance, funded by voluntary contributions, will provide an inclusive multi-stakeholder global platform and forum for policy dialogue on the use of information and communication technology for advancing the achievement of internationally agreed development goals. The Alliance will function primarily as a decentralized network building on the experience of the Information and Communication Technologies Task Force and other initiatives. It will help to link other initiatives to provide a global multi-stakeholder platform, making extensive use of online networking and collaborative tools, avoiding duplication and minimizing the need for meetings. The Alliance will report periodically to the Secretary-General, with a view to reflecting the Alliance's activities in the annual reports of the Secretary-General to the Council.

Financial mechanisms

40. Regarding financial mechanisms for meeting the challenges of information and communication technologies for development, paragraph 27 (g) of the Tunis Agenda states that multilateral, regional and bilateral development organizations should

consider the utility of creating a virtual forum for the sharing of information by all stakeholders on potential projects, on sources of financing and on institutional financial mechanisms.

41. Consultations on the optimal modalities for integrating relevant existing portals and databases, spearheaded by UNDP, are continuing.

Internet governance

42. The World Summit on the Information Society requested the Secretary-General to start a process towards enhanced cooperation to develop globally applicable principles on public policy issues associated with the coordination and management of critical Internet resources. The Summit recognized the need for enhanced cooperation to enable Governments, on an equal footing, to carry out their roles and responsibilities in international public policy issues pertaining to the Internet and expressed the view that the process should involve all stakeholders and all relevant organizations and should be started by the end of the first quarter of 2006. The Secretary-General asked his Special Adviser for the World Summit on the Information Society to start consultations on how to proceed. The outcome of the consultations will be communicated in due course.

43. The second phase of the Summit succeeded in reaching an international consensus on Internet governance matters. The Tunis Agenda calls for further internationalization of Internet governance arrangements. It places the discussions in a development context and calls for greater capacity-building efforts to enable developing countries to participate effectively in Internet governance arrangements. The Summit agreed on a broad definition of Internet governance that goes beyond names, numbers and addresses and involves all stakeholders. Furthermore, it identified some priority issues related to the use of the Internet, which require the attention of the international community, such as spam, data protection, freedom of expression, security, cybercrime and the multilingualization of the Internet.

44. The Summit requested the Secretary-General to convene, in an open and inclusive process, a new forum for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue called the Internet Governance Forum. The mandate of the Forum, as set out in paragraph 72 of the Tunis Agenda, is, inter alia, to discuss public policy issues related to key elements of Internet governance in order to foster the sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development of the Internet.

45. The Secretary-General asked his Special Adviser for the Summit to start a broad-based consultative process on this mandate with the aim of developing a common understanding among all stakeholders on the nature and character of the Internet Governance Forum. In the beginning of January 2006, a website was set up to initiate the process with a request for contributions. On 16 and 17 February, consultations were held in Geneva that were open to all stakeholders.

46. The meeting indicated an emerging consensus that the activities of the Forum should have an overall development orientation. It was equally recognized that capacity-building should be an overarching priority. Capacity-building should enable meaningful participation in global Internet policy development and include both assistance to attend meetings and training in the subject matter. Furthermore, there was a common understanding that the Forum should meet once a year for three to five days.

47. Based on the outcome of the consultations, the Secretary-General decided to establish a small secretariat in Geneva to assist in the convening of the Forum. In the light of the consultations and the contributions submitted to the secretariat, the Secretary-General created a multi-stakeholder advisory group to assist him in his task. On 17 May he announced the establishment of the group, which is being chaired by his Special Adviser. It includes 46 members from Governments, the private sector and civil society, including the academic and technical communities, representing all regions.

48. A second round of consultations, held in Geneva on 19 May 2006, further clarified the substantive priorities for the first meeting of the Forum. Spam, multilingualism, cybercrime, cybersecurity, privacy and data protection, freedom of expression, human rights and interconnection costs were among the most frequently mentioned issues. The advisory group met on 22 and 23 May and agreed on the broad outlines of the agenda and programme of the first meeting of the Forum. The meeting will be held under the overarching theme "Internet governance for development", and its substantive sessions will be organized around the following four broad themes: openness — freedom of expression, free flow of information, ideas and knowledge; security — creating trust and confidence through collaboration; diversity — promoting multilingualism and local content; and access — Internet connectivity: policy and cost. In addition to the main sessions, there will be a number of workshops dedicated to specific issues. Capacity-building will be a priority. The Forum will be open and inclusive and will allow all entities and individuals with proven experience and expertise in issues related to Internet governance to participate.

49. The Government of Greece has offered to host the first meeting of the Forum, which will be held in Athens from 30 October to 2 November 2006.

III. Concluding observation

50. The World Summit on the Information Society was unique in that global leaders laid the cornerstone for building a truly global, inclusive, development-oriented and people-centred information society, based on a multi-stakeholder approach. The outcome of the Summit was framed as a creative forward-looking programme of action engaging all relevant stakeholders. This effort will require consistent and systematic support and guidance from national Governments, relevant intergovernmental bodies and international organizations, as well as the active involvement of other stakeholders. The setting up of the United Nations group on the information society by CEB will enable the organizations of the United Nations system to act together to support progress in building the information society pursuant to the outcomes and targets of the Summit.